



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) & Cantonese
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

2015 saw dual running for Higher examinations, and was the final year of examination for the existing Higher level in Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese. The number of candidates was lower than the previous year.

The content of the examination related clearly to the teaching syllabus, as indicated by the prescribed themes and topics for Higher level, and was of an appropriate level of difficulty.

The overall level of candidate performance was very strong.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the examination, and there are some outstanding performances. Most candidates were clearly well prepared for the examination, and familiar with the format.

Reading and Translation was well done, with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage ‘你真的需要上大学吗?’ accessible and on a topic they could relate to. There was also less evidence of ‘word for word translation’ of the text resulting in the loss of marks through awkward use of English.

Listening was performed very well this year, particularly in Mandarin, where some very able candidates gave very good answers.

The candidates again performed well in both Writing pieces and Speaking. There were many outstanding short essays, in which learned language was successfully adapted to suit the context. In Directed Writing, many candidates fully engaged with the topic, and some very able candidates produced a well-structured and accurate piece of writing containing an excellent range and variety of language structures.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In the Reading and Translation passage, some candidates failed to identify key information accurately, such as in Q2 (a) ‘What subject did he specialise in at University?’ Some candidates answered ‘International business’ rather than ‘International economy’ (国际经济). In Q3(b), some candidates just provided ‘experience’ rather than ‘work experience’. Some candidates failed to demonstrate comprehension by failing to recognise the more straightforward factual information, such as in Q2 (c), where 百分之五 (5%) was mistaken for 50%.

It is important to read through and fully understand questions before answering them. Quite a few candidates failed to understand Q5 (a) *What does she believe about the provision of university education?*

Translation was a challenging part of the paper. Most candidates did well in sections 1–3 but found sections 4–5 more difficult. Some marks were lost through a lack of precision and accuracy. Many candidates lose marks through a lack of accuracy in translating articles and conjugations, (particularly ‘the’, ‘if’, and ‘then’) and misusing tenses. Translation needs holistic understanding of the sentence rather than word-by-word translation. Only the more able candidates translated successfully the following sentences: 如果你怕大学毕业找不到工作，那么没上大学，找工作更难。

Candidates in general did well in **Listening**, although some lost points through a lack of accuracy, for example Q2 (b) where the answer should be **two hours per day**, a number of candidates neglected **per day**.

In **Directed Writing**, a number of candidates failed to address all bullet points as required, for which they were penalised. One or two candidates with sophisticated language wrote something irrelevant to the topic in the paper. Although the language was very good, low marks were awarded.

In **Listening**, overall performance improved, though some candidates copied what they found in the dictionary without checking its accuracy, or how to fit it into the sentence. There was evidence of literal translation from English to Chinese, relying overly on dictionaries to create wholly new sentences.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

It is recommended that centres share this report with candidates, along with the Marking Instructions for the 2015 paper, to demonstrate to them the correct amount of detail required for a mark at Higher level in both Reading and Listening, as well as the precision required for Translation.

Writing Criteria for both Directed Writing and the Short Essay should be shared and discussed with candidates.

Reading and Translation

- ◆ Centres should continue with the established good practice in preparing candidates for reading questions.
- ◆ Continue to highlight to candidates the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate translation.
- ◆ Centres also should encourage candidates to read the passage globally rather than sentence by sentence, in order to gain full understanding of the whole passage.
- ◆ In the translation section, encourage candidates to pay particular attention to the articles and tenses used. Candidates should also be told not to include information from the translation section in their comprehension answers.

Listening

- ◆ Before candidates listen to the recording, they should study the heading and questions, and the marks allocated to them. This will help them anticipate the type of information that will be required.
- ◆ It is important that candidates do not presume the context of what they hear and avoid guesswork.
- ◆ Candidates should put a line through any notes that they do not wish to be marked.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to give as much detail as possible in their answers and not to lose marks by lack of accuracy and inaccurate information.

Writing

- ◆ Centres should continue with the established good practice in preparing candidates for writing.
- ◆ In Directed writing, writing a long passage but missing out bullet points will not result in a high mark. Advise candidates to read carefully each bullet point and to ensure that they do not miss any bullet point and also to ensure to use learned material is both relevant and appropriate to the bullet point.
- ◆ Centres should be reminded that writing tasks require candidates to select, manipulate, and recombine learned material appropriate to the specific tasks, not to rely on the dictionary to help them to create new sentences.
- ◆ In Directed writing, if pre-learned material is used, it should be incorporated intelligently and logically into the scenario, making any necessary textual and grammatical adjustments. It is disappointing to note that in some centres candidates write almost identical essays or almost identical paragraphs to specific bullet points.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	100
Number of resulted entries in 2015	69

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100				
A	89.9%	89.9%	62	70
B	2.9%	92.8%	2	60
C	4.3%	97.1%	3	50
D	1.4%	98.6%	1	45
No award	1.4%	-	1	

For this Course, grade boundaries have been stable across the last two years and the intention was to set similar grade boundaries this year. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.